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# Chefs, Head Cooks, and Food Preparation and Serving Supervisors

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## Significant Points

- Most workers in these occupations have prior experience in the food service or hospitality industries.
- While most workers have some postsecondary training, many experienced workers with less education can still be promoted into these positions.
- Job opportunities are expected to be good, largely because of high turnover; however, keen competition is expected for jobs at upscale restaurants that generally pay more.

## Nature of the Work

Chefs, head cooks, and food preparation and serving supervisors oversee the daily food service operation of a restaurant or other food service establishment. *Chefs* and head cooks are usually responsible for directing cooks in the kitchen, dealing with food-related concerns, and providing leadership. They are also the most skilled cooks in the kitchen and use their creativity and knowledge of food to develop and prepare recipes.

*Food preparation and serving supervisors* oversee the kitchen and non-kitchen staff in a restaurant or food service facility. They may also oversee food preparation workers in fast food, cafeteria, or casual dining restaurants, where the menu is fairly standard from day to day, or in more formal restaurants, where a chef provides specific guidelines and exacting standards on how to prepare each item.

All of these workers—chefs, head cooks, and food preparation and serving supervisors—hire, train, and supervise staff, prepare cost estimates for food and supplies, set work schedules, order supplies, and ensure that the food service establishment runs efficiently and profitably. Additionally, these workers ensure that sanitation and safety standards are observed and comply with local regulations. Fresh food must be stored and cooked properly, work surfaces and dishes clean and sanitary, and staff and customers safe from illness or injury to avoid being closed by the health department or law enforcement.

While all chefs have a role in preparing the food, developing recipes, determining serving sizes, planning menus, ordering food supplies, and overseeing kitchen operations to ensure uniform quality and presentation of meals, different types of chefs may have unique roles to perform or specialize in certain aspects of the job. Executive chefs, head cooks, and chefs de cuisine, are primarily responsible for coordinating the work of the cooks and directing the preparation of meals. Executive chefs are in charge of all food service operations and also may supervise several kitchens of a hotel, restaurant or corporate dining operation. A sous chef, or sub chef, is the second-in-command and runs the kitchen in the absence of the chef. Many chefs earn fame both for themselves and for their kitchens because of the quality and distinctive nature of the food they serve.

As a greater variety of establishments prepare and serve food, chefs and head cooks and first-line supervisors of food

preparation and serving workers can be found in a greater variety of places. Grocery and specialty food stores employ these workers to develop recipes and prepare meals for customers to carry out. They increasingly work in residential care facilities, such as nursing homes, and in schools and hospitals. Some chefs and head cooks work for individuals rather than for restaurants, cafeterias, or food manufacturers. Personal chefs and private household cooks plan and prepare meals in private homes according to the client's tastes or dietary needs. They order groceries and supplies, clean the kitchen, and wash dishes and utensils. They also may serve meals. Personal chefs usually prepare a week's worth of meals in the client's home for the client to heat and serve according to directions. They may be self-employed or work as part of a team of personal chefs and employed by a company that provides this service. Private household cooks typically work full time for one client, such as corporate executives, university presidents, or diplomats, who regularly entertain as a part of their official duties.

While the work of chefs and head cooks is concentrated in the kitchen or in providing overall guidance, food preparation and serving supervisors oversee specific areas of operation in food service establishments or the kitchen and counter areas of quick service restaurants. In fast food and casual dining restaurants, they may share many of the same functions with food service managers. They are responsible for dealing with customer complaints, balancing the books at the end of the day, scheduling workers, and ordering supplies. They also supervise and train kitchen and food preparation staff and ensure that these workers know how to gather food supplies, operate equipment, and assemble orders.

**Work environment.** Restaurants and other food service facilities where these workers are employed are required to be clean and sanitary. Although the seating areas of eating places are often attractive, kitchens can be crowded and hot and filled with potential dangers, such as hot ovens and slippery floors. Job hazards for those working in kitchens include slips and falls, cuts, and burns, but these injuries are seldom serious. Chefs, head cooks, and supervisors are under constant pressure to get meals prepared quickly, while ensuring quality is maintained and safety and sanitation guidelines are observed. Because the pace can be hectic during peak dining times, workers must be able to communicate clearly so that food orders and service are done correctly.

Work hours in restaurants may include early mornings, late evenings, holidays, and weekends. Schedules for those working in offices, factories and school cafeterias may be more regular. In fine-dining restaurants, work schedules tend to be longer because of the time required to prepare ingredients in advance. Many executive chefs regularly work 12-hour days because they oversee the delivery of foodstuffs early in the day, plan the menu, and prepare those menu items that require the most skill. Depending upon the days of operation, some chefs or other supervisors may take less busy days off to offset the longer hours on other days.

## Training, Other Qualifications, and Advancement

Most workers in these occupations have prior experience in the food service or hospitality industries. Most start as food prep-

aration workers or line cooks in a full-service restaurant and work their way up to positions with more responsibility. Some attend cooking school or take vocational training classes and participate in internships or apprenticeship programs to acquire the additional skills needed to create menus and run a business.

**Education and training.** While most chefs, head cooks, and food preparation and serving supervisors have some postsecondary training, many experienced workers with less education can still be promoted. Formal training may take place at a community college, technical school, culinary arts school, or a 2-year or 4-year college with a degree in hospitality. A growing number of chefs participate in training programs sponsored by independent cooking schools, professional culinary institutes, 2-year or 4-year colleges with a hospitality or culinary arts department, or in the armed forces. Some large hotels and restaurants also operate their own training and job-placement programs for chefs and head cooks. Executive chefs, head cooks, and sous chefs who work in fine-dining restaurants require many years of training and experience.

For students in culinary training programs, most of their time is spent in kitchens learning to prepare meals by practicing cooking skills. They learn knife techniques and proper use and care of kitchen equipment. Training programs also include courses in nutrition, menu planning, portion control, purchasing and inventory methods, proper food storage procedures, and use of leftover food to minimize waste. Students also learn sanitation and public health rules for handling food. Training in food service management, computer accounting and inventory software, and banquet service are featured in some training programs. Most formal training programs also require students to get experience in a commercial kitchen through an internship, apprenticeship, or out-placement program.

Although formal training is an important way to enter the profession, many chefs are trained on the job, receiving real work experience and training from chef-mentors in the restaurants where they work. Others enter the profession through formal apprenticeship programs sponsored by professional culinary institutes, industry associations, and trade unions in coordination with the U.S. Department of Labor. The American Culinary Federation accredits more than 200 formal academic training programs and sponsors apprenticeship programs around the country. Typical apprenticeships last 2 years and combine classroom training and work experience. Accreditation is an indication that a culinary program meets recognized standards regarding course content, facilities, and quality of instruction.

**Other qualifications.** Chefs, head cooks, and food preparation and serving supervisors must demonstrate strong leadership and communication skills and have the ability to motivate others. Chefs and head cooks also must have an intense desire to cook, be creative, and have a keen sense of taste and smell. Personal cleanliness is essential because most States require health certificates indicating that workers are free from communicable diseases. Knowledge of a foreign language can be an asset because it may improve communication with other restaurant staff, vendors, and the restaurant's clientele.

**Certification and advancement.** The American Culinary Federation certifies pastry professionals, personal chefs, and culinary educators in addition to various levels of chefs. Certi-



*Chefs, head cooks, and food preparation and serving supervisors work long hours preparing ingredients before cooking.*

fication standards are based primarily on experience and formal training. Although certification is not required, it can help to prove accomplishment and lead to advancement and higher-paying positions.

Advancement opportunities for chefs, head cooks, and food preparation and serving supervisors depend on their training, work experience, ability to perform more responsible and sophisticated tasks, and their leadership abilities.

Food preparation and serving supervisors may advance to become food service managers while some chefs and head cooks may go into business as caterers or personal chefs or open their own restaurant. Others may become instructors in culinary training programs, consultants on kitchen design, or food product or equipment sales representatives. A number of chefs and head cooks advance to executive chef positions or food service management positions. When staying in the restaurant business, advancement usually involves moving to a better, busier, or bigger restaurant or working at the corporate level overseeing several restaurants or food service facilities or testing new recipe, menu, or design concepts. (See the section on food service managers elsewhere in the *Handbook*.)

## Employment

Chefs, head cooks, and food preparation and serving supervisors held 941,600 jobs in 2008. Food preparation and serving supervisors held 88 percent of these jobs and chefs and head cooks held the remaining 12 percent. Nearly half of chefs and head cooks were employed at full-service restaurants (those that had table service). About nine percent each were employed by hotels and the special food services industry that includes caterers and food service contractors. Eight percent were self-employed.

Forty-three percent of food preparation and serving supervisors were employed by limited-service eating places, made up mostly of cafeterias and fast food restaurants and other places that offer simple carry-out food items. Another 25 percent were employed by full-service restaurants. Supervisors are also found in schools, the special food services industry, and a wide variety of other places that serve food.

## Projections data from the National Employment Matrix

Occupational Title	SOC Code	Employment, 2008	Projected Employment, 2018	Change, 2008-2018	
				Number	Percent
Supervisors, food preparation and serving workers.....	35-1000	941,600	997,000	55,400	6
Chefs and head cooks.....	35-1011	108,300	108,500	200	0
First-line supervisors/managers of food preparation and serving workers .....	35-1012	833,300	888,500	55,100	7

(NOTE) Data in this table are rounded. See the discussion of the employment projections table in the *Handbook* introductory chapter on *Occupational Information Included in the Handbook*.

### Job Outlook

Job opportunities are expected to be good, despite slower than average employment growth, due to the large numbers of workers who leave the occupation and need to be replaced. However, keen competition is expected for jobs at upscale restaurants that generally pay more.

**Employment change.** Employment of chefs, head cooks, and food preparation and serving supervisors is expected to increase by 6 percent over the 2008-18 decade, which is more slowly than the average for all occupations. Growth will be generated by increases in population, a growing variety of dining venues, and continued demand for convenience. As more people opt for the time-saving ease of letting others do the cooking, the need for workers to oversee food preparation and serving will increase. Also, there is a growing consumer desire for healthier, made-from-scratch meals that chefs and head cooks can better prepare.

**Job prospects.** Job openings for chefs, head cooks, and food preparation and serving supervisors are expected to be good through 2018; however, competition should be keen for jobs at the more upscale restaurants that tend to pay more. Workers with a good business sense will have better job prospects, especially at restaurant chains where attention to costs is very important. Although job growth will create many new positions, the majority of job openings will stem from the need to replace workers who leave the occupation. The fast pace, long hours, and high energy levels required for these jobs often lead to high turnover.

### Earnings

Earnings of chefs, head cooks, and food preparation and serving supervisors vary greatly by region and the type of employer. Earnings are usually highest in upscale restaurants and hotels, where many executive chefs are employed, and in major metropolitan and resort areas.

Median annual wage-and-salary earnings of chefs and head cooks were \$38,770 in May 2008. The middle 50 percent earned between \$29,050 and \$51,540. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$22,120, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$66,680. Median annual wages in May 2008 in the industries employing the largest number of chefs and head cooks were:

Other amusement and recreation industries .....	\$45,650
Traveler accommodation .....	44,660
Special food services.....	40,890
Full-service restaurants .....	36,700
Limited-service eating places.....	30,060

Median annual wage-and-salary earnings of food preparation and serving supervisors were \$28,970 in May 2008. The middle 50 percent earned between \$22,530 and \$37,290. The lowest 10 percent earned less than \$18,530, and the highest 10 percent earned more than \$46,810. Median annual wages in May 2008 were \$32,560 in full-service restaurants and \$25,420 in limited-service eating places, the industries employing the largest numbers of food preparation and serving supervisors.

Some employers provide employees with uniforms and free meals, but Federal law permits employers to deduct from their employees' wages the cost or fair value of any meals or lodging provided, and some employers do so. Chefs, head cooks, and food preparation and serving supervisors who work full time often receive typical benefits, but part-time workers usually do not.

In some large hotels and restaurants, kitchen workers belong to unions. The principal unions are the Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees International Union and the Service Employees International Union.

### Related Occupations

Other people who prepare food items include:

Bakers

Cooks and food preparation workers

Others who also work closely with these workers in the food service industry include:

Food and beverage serving and related workers

Food service managers

### Sources of Additional Information

Information about job opportunities may be obtained from local employers and local offices of the State employment service.

Career information about chefs, cooks, and other kitchen workers, including a directory of 2-year and 4-year colleges that offer courses or training programs is available from:

► National Restaurant Association, 1200 17th St. NW., Washington, DC 20036. Internet: <http://www.restaurant.org>

Information on the American Culinary Federation's culinary apprenticeship and certification programs and a list of accredited culinary programs is available from:

► American Culinary Federation, 180 Center Place Way, St. Augustine, FL 32095. Internet: <http://www.acfchefs.org>

For information about becoming a personal or private chef, contact:

➤ American Personal & Private Chef Association,  
4572 Delaware St., San Diego, CA 92116. Internet:  
**<http://www.personalchef.com>**

For information about culinary apprenticeship programs registered with the U.S. Department of Labor, contact the local office of your State employment service agency, check the department's apprenticeship web site: **[http://www.doleta.gov/OA/eta\\_default.cfm](http://www.doleta.gov/OA/eta_default.cfm)**, or call the toll free helpline: (877) 872-5627.

The Occupational Information Network (O\*NET) provides information on a wide range of occupational characteristics. Links to O\*NET appear at the end of the Internet version of this occupational statement, accessible at **<http://www.bls.gov/ooh/ocos330.htm>**